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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN MEDIA REACTION TO BREAKING SCANDAL - JANUARY 31,
2009

¶1. SUMMARY: Press reports of the CIA station chief in Algiers accused of raping two Algerian women, which broke on ABC News on the evening of January 28, were splashed across the front pages of almost every Algerian newspaper on January 31. The extensive reporting was largely a translation of the original ABC News report and subsequent reporting by the Western press. Commentary expressed in editorials and within some of the articles largely condemns the alleged crimes while criticizing the GOA for allowing the CIA to operate in Algeria without the knowledge of the general public. Comments posted in online discussion boards echoed the same sentiments while also sparking debates on rape and making value judgments on the two alleged victims. Apart from a statement by the Algerian Ambassador to the U.S., there has yet to be an official GOA public response to the matter. END SUMMARY

¶2. The news of an investigation into allegations of rape broke Wednesday (January 28) evening in the U.S., too late to make it into Thursday's Algerian press. As newspapers do not come out on Fridays in Algeria, the story first made its appearance in Algerian print media on Saturday January 31. Coverage was, however, carried on Tout Sur L'Algerie, an online Algerian news site based in France, the day after the story broke. The story made the front page of all major daily newspapers in Algeria except the government owned papers and Le Soir D'Algerie, an anti-government French-language newspaper which instead chose to print a policy interview with Embassy Pol/Econ Chief conducted six weeks earlier. All the Algerian news articles were based on the original ABC News report, the affidavit in support of the search warrant and the Embassy Spokesperson's comments (strictly based on the DOS approved guidance). A few journalists injected commentary into their articles; some lost some accuracy in translation, while a few went so far as to take liberties with the facts of the case.

Government Press

¶3. The GOA holds a monopoly over TV and radio in Algeria, as well as publishing six daily newspapers and running the national press agency Agence Presse Service. There has been no official GOA statement concerning this case to date. Therefore, there has also been no mention of the story in the government run media.

French-Language Press

¶4. The majority of French-language reporting was factual and based on the original ABC News report. A few facts were misconstrued during translation in some articles but commentary was kept to a minimum. There were, however, several editorials written criticizing the idea of CIA presence in Algeria and the GOA's failure to inform the populace of same. Many of the articles commented on the likelihood of this scandal having a negative impact on the new administration's efforts to reach out to the Arab world. The medium circulation Le Jeune Independant was the only paper to criticize the public press's silence, but also implied that the subject of the press reports had "run away" to the U.S. after the alleged rapes.

Selected Headlines:

"Sex, rapes, and videos at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers." Largest circulation French-language daily El Watan

"The CIA tainted by a sexual scandal in Algiers." Influential daily Liberte

"Scandal at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers: The CIA chief drugs and rapes two Algerian women." Large circulation daily Le Quotidien d'Oran

"What is the CIA doing in Algiers?" Influential daily L'Expression

Moderate Arabic-Language Press

15. As with the French-language press, the majority of Arabic-language newspapers printed factual articles based on previous Western reporting. The second largest Arabic-language daily El Khabar, however, reported that Washington has already assured the Algerian government that it was an isolated incident and that the investigation is ongoing. The paper also reported that, when Ambassador Pearce met with the Algerian Minister-Delegate for Defense on January 29, he provided details about the case and expressed the USG's hope that this incident would not negatively affect the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The leading political party's newspaper, Sawt Al Ahrar, also printed a factual article, but included a quote from an Algerian political science professor and former army officer, who claimed the incident was an American plot against Algeria.

16. In an entirely unique article, the medium circulation Ennahar El Djadid printed a story claiming that one of the two alleged victims was an Algerian spy working for the U.S. A commentary in the same paper implied that the downfall of the alleged CIA officer was a retaliatory act by the CIA in response to President Obama's recent efforts to close Guantanamo, end torture, and close secret prisons. The author reinforced this argument by comparing the officer, an African-American Muslim, to President Obama, an African-American with Muslim family ties.

Selected Headlines:

"CIA station chief in Algiers rapes two Algerian women; U.S. Ambassador to Algiers coordinates with the Ministry of Defense on the investigation." Large circulation El Khabar

"Washington repatriates its intelligence officer after he raped two Algerian women; U.S. Embassy in Algiers avoids giving information." Ruling political party's newspaper Sawt Al Ahrar

"An Algeria woman spy takes down a CIA officer in Hydra (Algiers)." medium circulation Ennahar El Djadid

Conservative Arabic-Language Press

17. Even the conservative Arabic-language Algerian press printed factual articles on the case, although their commentary tended to be harsher. The medium circulation Islamist daily El Bilad claimed that the videotaping of alleged sexual acts with the women was meant to be used to blackmail them into spying for the U.S. The best-selling newspaper in Algeria, the anti-American Echourouk El Youmi, printed a scathing editorial likening the alleged rapes to other so-called violations by foreigners (read: Americans) in Algeria.

Selected Headlines:

"Diplomacy of kidnapping, rape, terror, and spying." Largest circulation daily Echourouk El Youmi

"Scandal rocks the diplomatic corps in Algeria: CIA station chief rapes two Algerian women." Medium circulation Islamist daily El Bilad

Pan-Arab Media

18. Several Pan-Arab media outlets reported on the news story after

it broke in the U.S. Al Arabyia, its parent channel MBC, and Al Jazeera all broadcast reports on the news. Many Pan-Arab newspapers, such as Asharq Al Awsat and Al Hayet, also printed articles. The coverage was largely based on a Reuters article and included the facts, as well as the assessment echoed by the various Pan-Arab news channels, that the allegations could "deal a major blow to the U.S. image abroad, at a time when President Barack Obama has called for a 'new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect' with the Muslim world."

Online News and Message Boards

¶9. Tout Sur L'Algerie, an internet based news site, was the first Algerian media outlet to post coverage of the story. Its coverage was factual and led to subsequent articles about the story and about the history of the CIA's presence in Algeria. One editorial piece was posted by the website describing the ways in which the scandal "brings embarrassment to both Algiers and Washington." The piece explained that the incident has revealed the presence of the CIA in Algeria after years of GOA assurances that they would not allow U.S. troops or intelligence agents on Algerian soil. The journalist also believed that the incident could be used by Islamist groups to further discredit the Algerian government by accusing it of collaborating with the enemy. For the Americans, the author felt this scandal would hinder the U.S. administration's attempts to improve the U.S. image in the Arab world.

¶10. The online articles sparked strong reactions and lively debate on the website's message boards. Postings began with anger and outrage over the alleged incident, but soon evolved into discussions and debates of two main themes. One was the shock over the CIA's presence in Algerian and the anger at the Algerian authorities for having kept it a secret from the public. The other was a debate over rape based on value judgments made about the two women in question by a number of readers. There were a significant number of posts blaming the victims for having gone to the house of a stranger and having consumed alcohol. Others responded with indignation over these remarks, underscoring the heinous nature of rape and the unacceptable attitude of blaming the victim. One posting glossed over the rapes of two women while "Bouteflika has been raping 36 million Algerians for ten years."

Block Quotes

"The CIA in Algiers, who knew?" By Sami Ousy Ali for El Watan

"It took a sordid sex scandal to break out in Washington for Algerians to learn that the CIA had a branch in Algiers. Did the Algerian authorities give their permission for the opening of such a branch in our country? If that is the case, the public was not informed, at least not officially...Yes, we know that our government already gave its permission for the opening of an FBI branch in Algiers, but the announcement that a CIA branch exists intrigues, shocks, and leaves one perplexed. To be convinced, all you have to do is read the various commentaries posted on the internet to comprehend the scope of this surprise."

"Diplomacy of kidnapping, rape, terror, and spying." Djamel Laalami for Echourouk El Youmi

"These two rapes are just another case to be added to the series of violations perpetrated by foreigners in Algeria. Foreign embassies were involved in collecting information from political parties, organizations and media during courtesy calls, in a blatant attempt to interfere in the country's internal affairs. Foreign entities were involved in spreading information about alleged bombings. Foreign entities were involved in painting a dark picture of Algeria in attempts to pressure it into changing its positions on several regional and international dossiers."

PEARCE